

Creative in Casselberry

SEMINOLE COUNTY'S SOUTHERNMOST CITY OFFERS ART FOR EVERYBODY, EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME.

BY G.K. SHARMAN

On a Friday afternoon, a handful of pint-sized Picassos gathered around a table to decorate boxes. One girl chose bright blue paint, another opted for orange, and a fearless 5-year-old mixed her colors together and went all Van Gogh on her project. Little fingers were soon blue and yellow and green and the paper covering the table looked like a Jackson Pollock.

This creative class took place at the Art House in Casselberry, a city whose philosophy is: art can be everywhere and everyone deserves to enjoy it. Central Floridians may not realize it, but Casselberry has become a cultural heavyweight, quietly and steadily making a name for the quality and variety of its cultural offerings, both locally and beyond. "The Casselberry community is defined by residents, businesses and government," says Mayor Charlene Glancy, who brought her grandkids to Art House to participate in that colorful class. "But without the beautiful landscapes, hardscapes, art, music, dancing, sculptures, parks and events, it is not complete. Simply put, the cultural arts tie it all together—they are the heart and soul of the people within."

The city has enough clout to draw headline jazz musicians such as Michael Lington, whose March concert brought some 3,500 people to Lake Concord Park. When legendary trumpeter and six-time Grammy Award-winner Arturo Sandoval came to play a few years ago, the crowd topped 8,000, with spectators driving from as far as Miami. It was the largest jazz event ever held in Casselberry.

Its biggest events are the jazz and Latin jazz concerts offered in the spring and fall—the next is slated for October—but the rest of the calendar is chock-full of great cultural programming, including exhibitions, free monthly film screenings and art shows, classes and workshops, musical performances, educational programs and artists' talks.



IT'S ALL SMILES AT THE CASSELBERRY ART HOUSE, where kids—as well as adults—can take a variety of classes and workshops, and enjoy special events including artists' talks and educational programs. Owned and operated by the city, the 2,500-square-foot venue is the heart of its cultural community.

PHELAN M. EBENHACK (4)



FROM LEFT: Seminole County Commissioners Anthony Aramendia and Sandra Solomon, Recreation Manager Linda Moore and Mayor Charlene Glancy are dedicated to keeping Casselberry a vibrant community with an abundance of arts offerings. Right: The Giant resides in Lake Concord Park; below: The Art House engages visitors of all ages.

The House that Art Built

The centerpiece—and the genesis—of Casselberry's ambitious efforts is the Art House, a 2,500-square-foot cultural center that, along with City Hall, bounds serene Lake Concord and the park. Its story begins in 2000 when the city acquired a house on the lakefront. It was basically an empty shell of a building, says Recreation Manager Linda Moore, whose department oversees the city's arts efforts.

"There was no life in it," she says, and no money in the budget for renovation. But local artists saw potential in the space. From the mosaic framing the front door to the gallery space to the classroom in the back, artists—with assistance from community sponsors such as Home Depot—turned the empty house into a cultural showcase. A real labor of love, Art House debuted in 2003.

It now hosts 12 exhibitions a year, as well as classes, workshops, lectures, poetry readings, multicultural events and outreach programs. It's also home to an Artist's Way group and the Florida Sculptors Guild. High-profile artists such as Bill Farnsworth, Morgan Samuel Price, Edson Campos and Marla E regularly lead workshops and classes there.

Committed to extending its cultural programming, the city recently bought the house next door. "The Art House Annex will expand the opportunity to host more artist workshops and classes and display outdoor sculpture in the garden surrounding the building," Moore says. "It will be a nice location to host smaller events, especially when the back patio area is renovated."



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A walkway will connect the two buildings and the annex could open as early as summer 2015. Rehab efforts will again rely on volunteers and sponsors. In addition, according to city officials, a couple of proposed construction projects near City Hall will include a cultural component, such as sculpture walks.

It Takes a Village

Moore is quick to credit city officials for creating an atmosphere that values the arts, however, she is the dynamo behind Casselberry's creative efforts. "The reason we're soaring is all because of her talent and her commitment," says Mayor Glancy.

The artists do their part as well, and are eager to participate, whether as volunteers, teachers, exhibitors or vendors at the regular art shows. Held on the second Friday of every month, Art & Music in the Park and The Food Truck Bazaar is a free, family-friendly event that features an array of local artists and crafters—from painters to jewelry makers to glass blowers—selling their work to a soundtrack of live music by area performers. Free film screenings are another staple, with First Friday Family Fun Night/Movies in the Park happening monthly as well.

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The community's appreciation for such offerings has continued to grow. "Citizens have taken notice of our dedication for embracing the arts and the numerous quality events we host throughout the year," says Commissioner Anthony Aramendia, vice president of Friends of the Park and chair of EarthFest, Seminole County's largest Earth Day event.

The city's cultural programming also serves a larger purpose. "I'm really proud of what we've done in Casselberry the last few years," says Sandra Solomon, a city commissioner and pastel painter. "We've used art as a way to improve our image, attract business and get people to move here."

One of the most noticeable improvement projects is a 30-by-30-foot mural at the intersection of Lilac Road and Palm Drive. Earlier this year, Marla E, a local artist and frequent instructor at the Art House, led about 30 residents and volunteers in the street-painting endeavor. Such projects are popular in places such as Portland, Ore., Solomon says, adding that this may be the first of its kind in Florida. But it won't be the last: the city plans to sponsor more murals in the future.

From the sculpture in the park to special art and music events, and from classes and workshops to exhibitions in



IN ADDITION TO VISUAL ART EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES, the Art House offers everything from poetry readings to Latin Jazz performances. Below: Under the direction of local artist Marla E, Casselberry residents and volunteers helped create a 30-by-30-foot street mural.

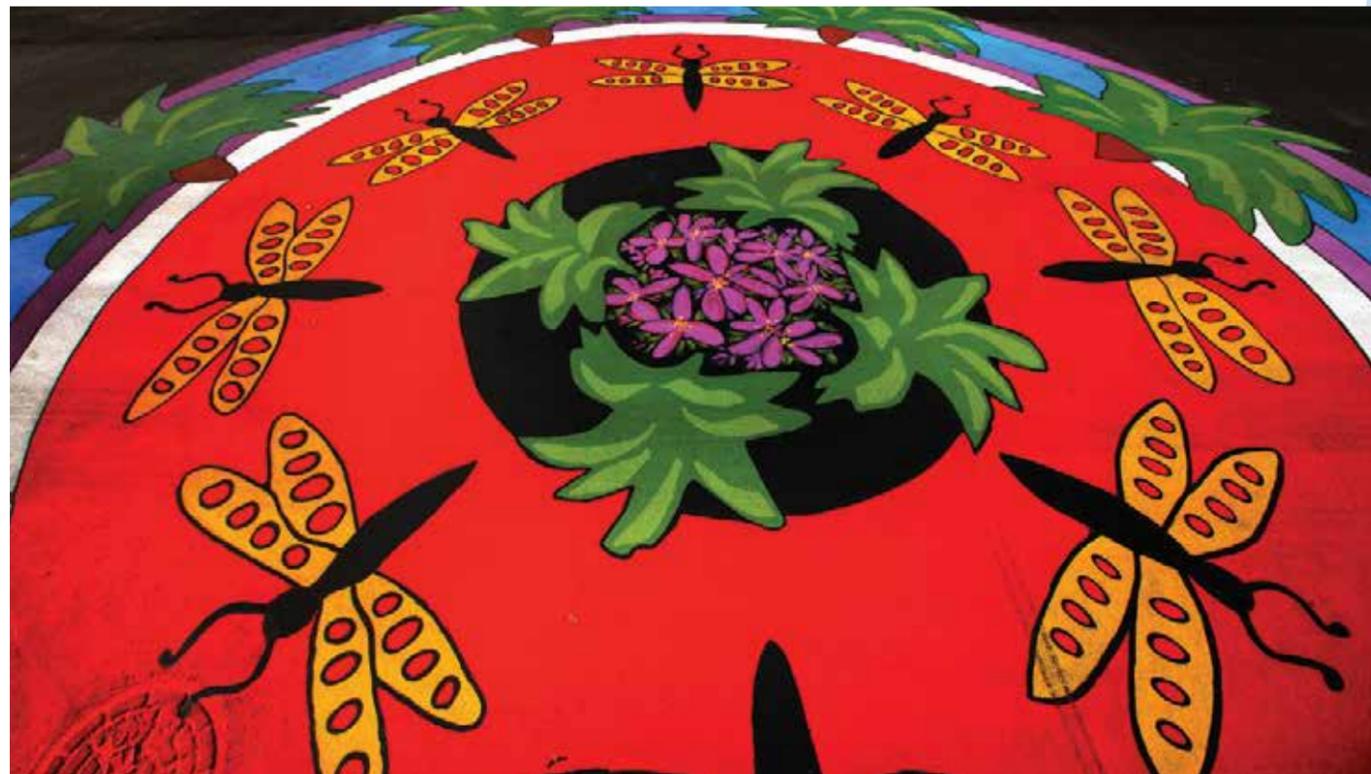
CITY OF CASSELBERRY

City Hall, Casselberry offers some sort of culture for people to enjoy every single day. And it's all thanks to the city's forward-thinking leaders, who have created what Moore calls, "a climate that includes art in everything we do."

The community plays a major role as well, from the people who volunteer their time, to the area businesses that offer contributions and partnerships that help fund Casselberry's art programs. For

more information, visit casselberry.org. To learn how you can help, contact the recreation department at 407.262.7700 x1301 or email LMoore@casselberry.org. Because, as with most creative endeavors, projects are a success when everybody gets involved. **OAM**

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